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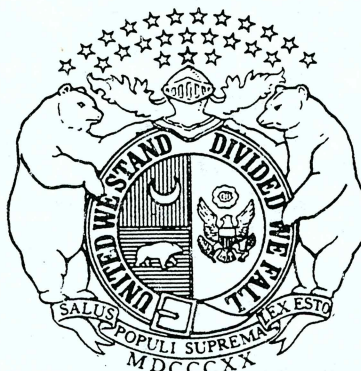
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DEPOSITORY DOCUMENT

1997 ANNUAL REPORT

STATE REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND



MISSOURI REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

MISSOURI

State Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind

P.O. Box 88, Jefferson City, Missouri 65103-0088
(573)751-4989 FAX(573) 751-4984

December 29, 1997

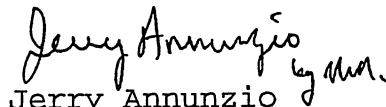
Governor Mel Carnahan
Missouri State Capitol Building
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Governor Carnahan:

Enclosed you will find the 1997 annual report produced by the Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind. As in previous years, we have continued to provide Rehabilitation Services for the Blind with information, analysis and ideas for the improvement of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired. Our review of agency policies, procedures and operations, along with the public forums we hold in conjunction with our meetings, has given consumers an important source of input into the rehabilitation process for Missourians who are blind.

We hope that you find this report both informative and readable. We stand prepared to answer any questions about this report, the operations of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind or the work of the Rehabilitation Advisory Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jerry Annunzio", with a small flourish or mark to the right.

Jerry Annunzio
Chairman
Rehabilitation Advisory
Council for the Blind

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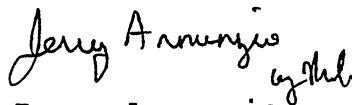
Fred Schroeder, Commissioner
United States Department of Education
Office of Special Education and
Rehabilitation Services
Rehabilitation Services Administration
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

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Jerry Annunzio
Chairman
Rehabilitation Advisory
Council for the Blind

**MISSOURI
STATE REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND**

CHAIRMAN - JERRY ANNUNZIO

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LORENA PERKINS
GARY WUNDER**

RSB DIRECTOR - SALLY HOWARD

**STAFF MEMBERS - RITA LYNCH
MICHAEL MERRICK**

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SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind (SRAC), created by Executive Order 93-01 on February 5, 1993, is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), a section of the Missouri Division of Family Services (DFS), on its provision of vocational rehabilitation services to Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

During the period of this report, the SRAC worked diligently in cooperation with RSB in many areas to improve the scope, range and quality of vocational rehabilitation services available in Missouri. Some of the areas in which the SRAC has concentrated its efforts this year include:

A previously unsurpassed number of Missourians have achieved employment through RSB's programs. During the period of this report, 371 Missourians achieved their vocational goals. Of these, 128 were placed in competitive employment, 26 work in extended (sheltered) placements, 31 became self-employed, and 4 went to work through the support of the Business Enterprise Program. An additional 182 consumers chose to become homemakers, and one chose to work for no pay in a family business. These figures represent an increase of 24% compared to FY 1996 employment outcomes. In the areas of competitive and self-employment, RSB recorded 159 closures as compared to 122 in FY 1996, an increase of over 30%.

The educational needs of Missouri's children who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Education Committee (CEC) has worked extensively with RSB, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and Missouri legislators to ensure that the concerns of children who are blind or visually impaired are expressed. The Council also recommended, in order to better serve this population, that RSB should exercise its

right and responsibility under state law to create and maintain a registry of all blind children in the state. Additionally, a member of the SRAC has been appointed to DESE's Ad-Hoc Committee on Blindness, extending the influence of the Council into the education process for all of Missouri's children.

The increasingly cooperative relationship between the SRAC and RSB. Changes in the structure of the SRAC, as well as discussion of the roles of the SRAC and RSB's administrator have led a relationship that has allowed the SRAC to work more closely with RSB. As a result, the SRAC played a significant role in RSB's decision to terminate the contract with the Colorado Center for the Blind. This contentious issue, which began during a SRAC meeting, was resolved through a process of investigation, joint review and recommendation in which the SRAC played a pivotal role. Similarly, RSB's budget was affected by the SRAC. When a budget decision item pertaining to accommodations for RSB staff was not recommended for inclusion in the budget, the SRAC advocated successfully with the Missouri Legislature to have the item reinstated. The decision item ultimately was passed by the Legislature and was signed by Governor Carnahan, providing funding that was much needed to allow RSB to continue to "practice what they preach" by hiring qualified persons who are blind or visually impaired.

During this year, the SRAC and RSB have taken further steps down the road that leads to a consumer driven rehabilitation process. Cooperation, shared goals and the valuing of input from the consumers of RSB's services have led to an agency that is more responsive to consumers, more considerate of their input, while at the same time helping them to gain success through employment. RSB and the SRAC have helped fulfill their joint charge to assist persons who are blind or visually impaired achieve to their fullest potential. The continuation of this momentum into the new fiscal year shows promise that RSB and the SRAC will provide an even greater number of Missourians with opportunities for independence and self-sufficiency through personal and vocational success.

SECTION II: PERFORMANCE OF RSB DURING FISCAL YEAR 1997

TABLE I. OVERALL CLOSURE STATISTICS BY FISCAL YEAR

	FY97 / FY96 / FY95
Total VR Caseload:	2397 / 1690 / 1708
Referrals:	867 / 965 / 959
Eligible:	672 / 621 / 528
Close before eligibility established	185 / 438 / 401
Closed as successful (26):	371 / 298 / 222
Closed unsuccessful after services (28)	132 / 138 / 88
Closed unsuccessful before IWRP services (30)	73 / 83 / 78

TABLE II. TYPES OF CLOSURE BY EXPENDITURE AND WEEKLY WAGES

TYPE OF CLOSURE	COST OF SERVICES	WEEKLY WAGES	ANNUAL INCOME
------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------	----------------------

BEP: 4 CLOSURES

\$95,989	\$1,851	\$96,252
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SELF-EMPLOYED: 31 CLOSURES

\$402,541	\$7,894	\$410,488
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SHELTERED: 26 CLOSURES

\$183,727	\$2,018	\$104,936
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COMPETITIVE: 128 CLOSURES

\$1,420,697	\$43,615	\$2,267,980
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HOMEMAKER: 182 CLOSURES

\$248,354		
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COST OF EMPLOYMENT CLOSURES (BEP, SELF-EMPL, SHELTERED, COMPETITIVE)

\$2,109,954

ANNUAL INCOME OF EMPLOYMENT CLOSURES

\$2,879,656

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CASELOAD AND CLOSURES DURING FISCAL YEAR 1997

RSB's caseload increased dramatically during FY 1997, with 2397 cases vs. 1690 for FY 96 and 1708 for FY 95. Referrals remained constant, although with a large increase in the rate of those determined eligible. Overall successful closures were up significantly, with 371 closed as successfully rehabilitated. This compares with FY 1996, when 298 cases were closed successfully, and FY 1995 with 222. Of particular interest are the numbers of those employed competitively, self-employed, in extended employment, or with the Business Enterprise Program. In FY 1997, RSB was involved in the successful rehabilitation of 189 consumers in these types of employment. This accomplishment shows an increase of 36.9% compared to FY 1996, and a 103% increase when compared to FY 1995. In the area of competitive employment, RSB recorded 129 closures, as compared to 106 in FY 1996 and 76 in FY 1995. These increases come in the area most emphasized by the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, that of competitive employment. Additionally, 182 consumers completed their rehabilitation as homemakers. Some of the types of employment achieved by RSB consumers include:

Auto Care Specialist*Caseworker*Disabled Student Counselor*
Computer Engineer*Personnel Director*Accounting
Technician*Advertising Representative*Telemarketer*Customer
Service Representative*Medication Technician*Construction
Engineer*Clinical Social Worker*Law Counselor

COST/INCOME COMPARISON

RSB expended \$2,109,9541 in rehabilitation funds on behalf of the 189 consumers who succeeded in competitive, extended, self-, and BEP employment during FY 1997. This relates to an average expenditure per case of \$11,126. In contrast, this group's annual income (extrapolated from weekly salary at time of closure) would be \$2,879,656, an amount which actually exceeds the cost of their rehabilitation in the first year following

rehabilitation. If a 20% tax rate existed (state and federal combined), the taxes paid by these consumers would repay the cost of their rehabilitation in less than four years, irrespective of the reduction in Social Security and other disability payments. A total of \$248,354 was expended on behalf of the 182 consumers closed as homemakers, averaging \$1,364 per case. In all, \$2,351,308 was spent on 371 cases, for an average expenditure of \$6,337. Overall, 89.4% of VR funds were expended in cases involving competitive, self-, extended and BEP employment. Only 10.6% of the funds expended were related to homemaker closures.

SECTION III. ACTIVITIES OF REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND AND THE STATE REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND DURING FY 1997

CONSUMER SURVEY:

In accordance with the Rehabilitation Act, which calls for the SRAC to monitor the effectiveness of and consumer satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services offered in the state, a survey of consumer satisfaction was conducted beginning in May, 1997. This survey was sent to all consumers whose cases were closed in status 26-28 for the Federal Fiscal Year ending September 30, 1996, as well as those cases closed in the first six months of Fiscal Year 1997. In all, 637 surveys were mailed. Each of the surveys was coded by use of a braille number in the lower corner, allowing staff to track those surveys which had not been returned. After the initial mailing, a reminder letter was sent to those who had not returned the survey. This letter offered to take the information telephonically if the consumer wished, giving the RSB toll free number to prevent expense to the consumer.

Of the 637 surveys originally prepared, 263 were completed and returned by mail or phone contact. This resulted in a completion rate of 41.2%.

The responses for each question were tabulated and analyzed to produce mean, median and mode responses, along with the standard deviation for each question. The average of the median scores for the 14 questions was 3.928 out of a possible 5.0 (with 5.0 being highly satisfied and

1.0 extremely dissatisfied) for those who work outside the home. The average median score for all "26" closures was 3.71. The sole area identified as a concern by the survey was a lack of satisfaction on the part of consumers that they had received the help needed to find employment (with a score of 3.189).

Areas of high satisfaction included:

- * overall outcomes from the rehabilitation experience**
- * RSB staff's knowledgeability about blindness and consumer needs**
- * individualization of the rehabilitation plan**
- * the consumers' control over choices in the rehabilitation program**

SRAC staff will meet with personnel from DSS regarding further analysis of the consumer satisfaction survey. Individual responses from the survey will be supplied to DSS for evaluation and analysis with regard to demographic data, including geographic location, race, gender, etc.

STUDENT NETWORK

In July, 1997, RSB took part in Student Network. Originating as a program sponsored by the NFB, RSB became involved in sponsoring the event in FY 1994. With the involvement of both the MCB and NFB, Student Network brought together 63 students who are visually impaired or blind from secondary and post-secondary schools throughout the state for a weekend seminar aimed at improving their understanding of issues related to students with disabilities, self-improvement and networking.

MENTOR PROGRAM:

As discussed in the FY 1995 SRAC Annual Report, RSB approached the Missouri Council of the Blind (MCB) and the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri (NFB) with the idea of sponsoring a voluntary network of mentors. This concept, originated by the MCB, would assign mentors to RSB consumers who have either recently lost their vision or begun their rehabilitation program. The mentors would visit consumers and provide them with information relative to their adjustment to blindness, act as a role model, or simply make themselves available to answer questions and provide moral support to the consumer.

55 persons volunteered to serve as mentors prior to the first training conducted during October, 1996. 33 persons attended the initial training. Lists of persons ready to be assigned as mentors are maintained in the district offices, along with a record of which mentors have been utilized and how often. RSB has received 161 requests from consumers who would like to have a mentor assigned to them. Eight SRAC members volunteered to serve as mentors, and several were involved in the development of the program.

87 matches of mentor to mentee have been made, but more mentors are needed. In an effort to get more mentors, an article was placed in the Blind Missourian and the Chronicle, the state newsletters of the two consumer groups. Letters regarding the program were also sent to all clients of RSB who were successfully closed in the past two years. In the future, a certificate of accomplishment will be sent to all successful closures by RSB, along with a letter inviting them to be a part of the Mentor Program.

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION OF FACILITY ISSUES

The subject of alleged restriction of client choice and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) violations at Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) contracted by RSB was first presented at the May, 1996, SRAC meeting. The main concern expressed was that restrictions had been placed

on the use of dog guides at the Colorado Center for the Blind (CCB) and the Iowa Center for the Blind. The SRAC voted to request the Governor's office to investigate past practices of all CRPs that RSB contracts with to see whether they have been in compliance with ADA and the Rehabilitation Act. The SRAC then defined the areas they believed should be investigated. Those areas included:

1. Are clients given choice of method of orientation and mobility, including the type of cane to be used?
2. Are there restrictions on the use of dog guides, and are dog guides discouraged?
3. Are materials available in different formats according to client choice?
4. What levels of Braille training are available?
5. Is the center in compliance with ADA?
6. Is the center in compliance with state policy?
7. Is independence maximally encouraged?
8. Does the program's policy instill work incentives?

An attorney from the St. Louis area, Diane Felix, was retained to conduct the investigation.

At the February meeting of the SRAC, the report of the independent investigation was discussed. The attorney who conducted the investigation provided a summary of the findings, and was interviewed by conference call during the meeting. Following discussion of the results of the investigation, the Council voted to recommend that if the compliance issues identified in the investigation can be worked out within 90 days, that RSB continue contracting with the CRPs, and if not, to terminate the contracts. The Deputy Director would report on this issue at the May Council meeting.

RSB staff and a representative chosen by the Council made on-site visits to the three CRPs mentioned in the investigation to determine their compliance with the RSB contract and with issues identified in the report. During the visit to CCB, based on the interviews of the students and the information they received during the visit, the team very quickly agreed that CCB seemed to be in compliance with ADA and the RSB contract. However, shortly before leaving, other information emerged which concerned the team. This concern was that students are allowed to work at an NFB fund-raising bingo game during training hours. Representatives of CCB defended this practice as training and characterized it as appropriate. The RSB representatives explained that RSB couldn't allow this practice and CCB agreed to stop it immediately.

The Deputy Director consulted with the Division of Family Services and with the Division of Legal Services upon her return, and it was decided to immediately take action to suspend new referrals to CCB until further notice.

At the May, 1997 meeting, the Deputy Director explained that there were three options available to RSB in the event that it was deemed necessary to terminate the contract with CCB: terminate the contract with cause immediately; terminate without cause in 30 days; or refuse to renew the contract in July. She added that the well-being of the three students currently at CCB should be considered and to also consider the impact of consumers wanting to go to CCB for PVA and Service Representative training, both now and in the future.

The SRAC recommended that the contract with CCB be terminated with cause immediately, exempting the three students who are currently at CCB. As part of that recommendation, a subcommittee of the Council would be created to work with RSB on the possibility of resuming the contract or writing a new contract with CCB in the future, if that became a possibility. The Deputy Director, in agreement with the recommendation, terminated the contract. At the time of this report, there has been no interest expressed in re-establishing a contract with RSB.

INPUT INTO STATE AND STRATEGIC PLANS

The Council authorized the Planning Committee to provide advice and recommendations on the State and Strategic Plans on the SRAC's behalf. Committee input on the State Plan was taken during a meeting with the Planning Committee on 5-30-97 and is as follows:

Students on RSB's caseload should be receiving public meeting notices, however, schools should be added to the mailing list

Should contact closed cases as well as current consumers.

RSB needs to discuss retention matters, including status of career ladders

Discuss distance learning, current status and future direction.

Recommend that RSB seek out community groups for outreach through RSB consumers (ask them what groups they belong to or are aware of) and through MCB/NFB local organizations

Strategic Plan input was gathered from a meeting of the Planning Committee on November 15, 1996. The input from the committee included:

That the RSB Mission Statement should be revised to reflect a "dedication to achievement of personal and vocational success."

That the word "informed" should be added to consumer choice in value statement number six

Priorities for action by RSB as expressed by the committee:

- 1. Working with children who do not have a college interest**
- 2. Develop a consistency of attitude/services/commitment agency-wide**
- 3. Improve the connection with the business community (RCs, Employment Specialists)**
- 4. Change the purchasing process**

In addition to the formal input into the State and Strategic Plan processes, the Planning Committee also took part in discussions aimed at improving public attendance/input into the planning process. These meetings produced the following recommendations:

RSB should address the problem of transportation for blind persons to get to public hearings

That RSB should include input received by the SRAC during the public forums held in conjunction with SRAC meetings in the State and Strategic Plan process.

That one public hearing per district office should be conducted, considering the public forums that are conducted around the state by the Council throughout the year. Additional hearings should be held in conjunction with the state conventions of the Missouri Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri (with their cooperation).

That the format for the hearings be changed by dividing the attendees into focus groups and asking the groups a pre-determined set of questions. Time should be allowed for accepting public comments or questions following the group discussion.

RSB agreed to take action on all of the recommendations listed above.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STREAMLINED IWRP

At the February 1997 meeting of the State Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind, RSB staff presented plans to use a simplified IWRP process and form. Concern was expressed that using a "check list" IWRP could degrade individuality in planning. The Council was assured that all specific information will be in the case record, and that the proposed IWRP meets all federal guidelines. The proposal for IWRP changes was turned over to the Program/Policy Committee for review and recommendations.

Following a series of telephone and personal conferences, the Program/Policy Committee made the following recommendations:

That RSB should add the Client Assistance Program (CAP) phone number to the proposed IWRP

That a statement should be added to the effect that rules and regulations for which the consumer is responsible will be made available by RSB, including training as necessary

That a statement be added clarifying that specifics of the consumer's plan are contained in the case record

That RSB should undertake a survey of consumers to determine their satisfaction with the new IWRP

RSB incorporated all of the changes recommended by the Council in the final draft of the new IWRP, and is conducting a survey of consumers who have experienced the new form as part of their rehabilitation program.

COUNCIL RETREAT:

During the August, 1996 meeting, a Council retreat separate from a regular business meeting was proposed and approved to take place in late October. The purpose of this retreat was to more clearly define the roles of the Council and RSB, and to develop a model for the Council and RSB working together more cooperatively.

The retreat, held on the weekend of October 19-20, was facilitated by a consultant from the University of Missouri-Columbia. Some of the outcomes from the retreat were:

The need to separate the Council members roles as a member from that of an advocate when involved with an individual case matter

Input into the agency's planning should take place at the earliest possible point in the process

The Council and RSB should generate more tasks for collaboration, via Strategic Planning and other plans for change, rather than just involvement with problem solving

The need to develop new strategies for developing improved client participation in RSB activities, planning, etc.

Involvement of the Council at the "Idea" stage of a new development, before it becomes policy

There is a lack of communication between meetings (both intra-Council as well as Council-Agency).

Council should spend less time at the meetings going over redundant items, and concentrate on decision points

DISINCENTIVES TO WORK

The Disincentives to Work Committee was created by a vote of the SRAC at the November, 1995 meeting. This committee is charged with drafting a document to consider some of the disincentives to work that exist for Missouri consumers with visual impairments, as well as suggesting methods to remove some of the disincentives which act as barriers to employment. The committee met by conference call and developed an outline of issues they would like to discuss. Some of the general areas discussed were:

Transportation: There is very little public transport in Missouri other than within the metropolitan areas.

Added cost of work: Expenses of going to work, when coupled with low wages may prove too burdensome to entice consumers to consider employment.

Education, training and skills: Many of RSB's consumers do not have sufficient education, training or skill without extensive personal and vocational adjustment to blindness.

Personal: Many consumers are reluctant to work due to fears of the unknown, the need to relocate or due to uncertain health.

The committee delivered a final report at the Council meeting in November, 1996. Some of the solutions proposed by the committee were:

That RSB be on the lookout for opportunities in which consumers can work out of their home, which would alleviate the transportation problem

RSB should consider negotiating with employers and other agencies in solving transportation problems

CRP STANDARDS

The current Facility Standards document was sent out to the members of the Council in order to give everyone an opportunity to review it. At the August, 1996 SRAC meeting, RSB requested that the "Facility Standards" be updated through a cooperative effort between the Council and RSB. This review and update would be assigned to the Program/Policy Committee. The major areas of change in the revision of this document were:

Updating the language of the standards to that of the current regulations/rules pertaining to vocational rehabilitation

Adding an employment perspective to the document that will promote an employment focus by the CRPs

Adding emphasis on the importance of informed consumer choice in all aspects of CRP programming

The committee, with the RSB Special Services Coordinator serving as a representative, met several times by teleconference to produce a draft that was presented to the Council on May 9, 1997. This draft was approved by the Council and recommended to RSB for adoption. The revised CRP Standards were included in the CRP contract request for proposal submitted in June, 1997

APPOINTMENTS TO THE SRAC

In the FY 1996 Annual Report, the SRAC reported on difficulties experienced in getting appointments to replace members whose terms had expired or who had resigned. Particularly troublesome in that respect were the positions of Client Assistance Program (CAP), Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) representatives.

During FY 1997, Governor Carnahan appointed seven new members, along with the reappointment of all members with expired terms. The Council would like to commend the work of the Governor's staff in making the appointment process more timely and responsive to the needs of the SRAC.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION ISSUES

During FY 1997, the Council has been extremely active in matters relating to the education of children who are visually impaired or blind. Beginning in December, 1996 the Chairman wrote the Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for Special Education, transmitting the recommendations of the Children's Education Committee. DESE replied in February, 1997 with a letter that did little to respond to the questions posed by the original letter.

At the May, 1997 meeting, the Council voted to send a letter to the Governor, outlining the concerns of the Council regarding the appropriate education of blind children, and the reluctance of DESE to take action to improve their services to those children. A joint resolution of the Missouri Legislature was approved in June, calling for DESE to create a plan to

satisfy many of the concerns expressed in the Council's recommendations. Following this development, a meeting was held between DESE, the Council, and members of the NFB and MCB. This meeting resulted in no major changes or improvements, but allowed the issues to be discussed in an open venue. The Assistant Commissioner for Special Education committed to providing a letter response to the SRAC by September 1, 1997, outlining a plan to address the concerns expressed during the meeting. As of the time of this report, no letter has been received. One improvement resulted from the meeting; the reinstitution of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Blindness. This committee had been instituted originally to serve as an internal blindness-related advisory committee to special education, however it had not met for several years. A SRAC representative was invited to serve as a member of this committee.

At the August, 1997 meeting, the Council recommended that RSB exercise its right and responsibility under state law to maintain a registry of all blind children in Missouri, and seek whatever information toward that end that is available from DESE. Also at the August meeting, the Council directed the CEC chairperson to contact the Senator and Representative who chair the appropriations committees in their respective houses. The objective of this contact was to identify issues and concerns of the Council to those officials, and to coordinate the continued attempts of the Council to raise questions regarding educational services available to blind children in Missouri.

CHILDREN'S SPECIALIST FOR THE BLIND

In response to two of the recommendations of the Children's Education Committee, in February, 1997 RSB changed the Pre-School Rehabilitation Teacher positions. The job description of the Preschool Rehabilitation Teacher has been revised to emphasize advocacy, including parent education, resource finding and referral. The official title of this position has also been changed to Children's Specialist for the Blind. Due to transition programs involving adult rehabilitation teachers and counselors, the age range of children to be served by the Children's Specialists has been changed from birth to five years to birth to fourteen years.

CONTRACTING FOR BRAILLE TEACHING

At the November, 1996 meeting of the SRAC, the Deputy Director explained that RSB is exploring various methods for providing some high volume services, such as Braille instruction. Due to the RT's large caseloads, there is not sufficient time to work with a student more than once per week, often even less. One possibility explored to augment the teaching services of the RT's was to contract paraprofessionals to perform Braille teaching.

At the February, 1997 meeting, the Deputy Director reported that a Request for Proposal (RFP) had been issued for contracting with Braille instructors for consumers. Anyone interested in teaching under this contract would be asked to take the same Grade II Braille competency test given to RTs. Similar contracts might be considered in the future for other high demand services, such as Orientation and Mobility.

OSEP MONITORING:

At the August, 1996 meeting, the Chairman notified the Council that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) would be holding hearings regarding Missouri's compliance with IDEA later in the year. In September, OSEP announced the dates and locations of the meetings. The Children's Education Committee (CEC), meeting by teleconference, recommended that RSB do as much as possible to notify parents of children with visual disabilities, and proposed that the Council be represented at all three of the hearing locations.

The SRAC, in cooperation with RSB, prepared a letter which was sent to all parents of children with visual disabilities in the RSB caseload. At the November, 1996 meeting, the Chairman reminded Council members of the OSEP hearings. Several Council members indicated that they would be attending the hearings in their local area. It was noted that the consumer groups will also be represented at the hearings. The Deputy Director of RSB encouraged District Supervisors and other interested RSB staff to attend in their areas. In order that the issues to be brought up at

each hearing location should be consistent and verifiable, it was decided that a letter written by the Chairman be submitted to the OSEP monitors at the hearings pointing out the concerns raised by the Council. A copy of this letter was sent to Council members prior to their attending the hearings.

Concerns to be presented at the hearings included:

- (1) Lack of O and M instruction
- (2) Encouraging the flexible use of paraprofessionals who have Braille teaching skills to fill in the gaps where teachers proficient in Braille reading and writing are not available
- (3) The need to offer more university programs for Braille instruction
- (4) The segregation of blind children in special education settings instead of inclusion in regular classrooms with appropriate supports
- (5) Failure to provide assistive devices
- (6) Delay in or lack of transition services from school to the world of work
- (7) DESE's reluctance to withdraw funding from local school districts that are not in compliance with IDEA

As a result of the Council's input at the OSEP monitoring hearings, the Chairperson of the CEC was invited to present the SRAC's concerns regarding special education for children who are blind or visually impaired at the April meeting of the PL 94-142 Panel.

MISSOURI SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND REPRESENTATIVE TO THE SRAC

At the February, 1996 meeting, the CEC recommended that the Chairman ask the Superintendent of the Missouri School for the Blind (MSB) to serve as a liaison representing the school to the SRAC. In June, 1996 the Superintendent agreed to come to SRAC meetings whenever possible.

At the November, 1996 meeting, the Superintendent of MSB gave the Council a brief overview of the history and current programs of MSB. She also informed the Council of some of the plans for the future. These included:

- * advanced Braille instruction with competency testing is to be added to the curriculum for certification of teachers of the visually impaired**
- * summer courses for paraprofessionals will be offered, providing blindness-specific training in areas such as Braille, Orientation and Mobility and alternative skills of blindness**
- * both direct and indirect teaching services through regional centers around the state**

According to the Superintendent, the provision of teaching services through the regional centers was a concept supported by MSB and DESE; however, the funding requested by DESE for this purpose was denied by the Legislature for State Fiscal Year 1997. Under this program, teachers of the visually impaired under the supervision of MSB would be stationed at regional centers throughout the state. They would then provide assessment, IEP development and direct teaching support for LEAs as needed within their region. She stated that DESE and MSB were attempting to secure private funding to allow the development of this program in the absence of appropriated funding. There was no further action taken on this program during the period of this report.

READERS AND DRIVERS

During the November, 1995 SRAC meeting, the RSB Deputy Director explained that a budget problem had occurred in RSB, necessitating savings in personnel expenditures. The budget shortfall came about in large part due to the increasing cost of providing accommodation to RSB's staff who are blind or visually impaired. The use of readers and drivers has led to RSB's incurring costs beyond those projected in the budget and FTE authorization. Since FY 1992, RSB's expenditures for readers and drivers

has increased by 87% (based on FY 1992 versus FY 1995 expenditures). The number of staff for whom this accommodation must be provided has increased from 20 (FY 1992) to its current level of 27, an increase of 37.6%. Salary for readers and drivers has changed also; from \$4.60 per hour in FY 1992 to \$6.28 in FY 1995, an increase of 36.5%.

RSB's current staff includes 27 employees who require the services of readers, drivers or both in order to be able to perform their duties. This has resulted in the use of approximately 12-14 FTEs of reader or driver time. This level of reader and driver usage occurred during a state fiscal year in which RSB had to absorb a reduction of two FTEs. RSB has requested an increase in FTEs for readers and drivers for the state fiscal year beginning in July, 1997 and has undertaken a review of their use with a view toward improving the effectiveness of this resource's use.

At the February, 1997 meeting of the SRAC, the Deputy Director reported that all new decision items in the FY98 RSB budget were recommended by the Department to the Governor's office; however, none of these items were included in the Governor's recommendations. This was likely due to the pressures of Welfare Reform on the state. The Council directed the Chairman to write a letter to the Chairman of the House Appropriations committee for Social Services, Representative Scott Lakin, asking that all new budget items be reinstated in the RSB budget. The priorities listed in the letter consisted of the following budget items in order of importance: (1) readers and drivers, (2) OBS staff, (3) establishment grant for technology, and (4) FTEs for an additional O&M specialist and RT.

At the May, 1997 meeting of the SRAC, the Deputy Director informed the Council that the readers and drivers budget request was put back in the RSB budget by the House Budget and Senate Appropriations Committees. She said the Senate committee also recommended the funding for the prison request, and this budget item is in Conference Committee. She thanked the Council for its help in this effort.

Subsequently, Governor Carnahan signed the budget bill including the requested increase in funding for reader/driver services.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

In August, 1997 RSB's Supported Employment program underwent changes designed to improve the viability of supported employment as a choice for consumers. The changes came in three areas: (1) RSB's supported employment contract, (2) RSB's policy concerning eligibility for supported employment services, and (3) training for RSB's staff concerning supported employment.

The RSB contract was revised to mirror the contract used by DVR. This contract, much simpler than the current RSB contract, had the effect of increasing the number of vendors willing to return a contract bid. RSB currently has approximately twice the number of available supported employment vendors compared to the previous year.

The development of the supported employment contract led to consideration of the eligibility criteria for this service. A new definition of eligibility was necessary, and was created by a committee including a prospective Council member. The result was a definition that was more clearly understandable by staff and consumers alike.

Training in the new contract and supported employment criteria for RSB consumers was conducted in February, 1997. During this training, a panel of supported employment service providers presented their concerns for working with RSB consumers, particularly the issues of blindness. As a result of this concern, a pre-bid conference was held with interested providers, during which RSB addressed methods of providing in-service training and technical support for the providers. This training and consultation will be provided on an as requested/needed basis when a consumer who is blind is considering placement with a service provider.

MEETING LOCATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

At the February, 1997 meeting of the SRAC, the Chairman explained that he has been receiving complaints regarding meeting locations and accommodations nearly every time the Council meets. It was suggested that

a list of concerns be assembled to present to the person in charge of making the arrangements for Council meetings, and invite her to come to the next meeting to respond to these concerns. Concerns expressed were: no Braille markings on rooms and other public areas, no braille menus, remote locations of hotels, hotels with no stairway indicators, proximity of meeting rooms to guest rooms, sensitivity training of hotel staff. These concerns were further discussed to identify which were clearly ADA violations and which were merely inconveniences. It was agreed that the only clear ADA violation was the lack of proper signage on rooms, etc.

The Council voted that RSB staff should meet with hotel personnel to provide sensitivity training prior to Council meetings. During the month before the meeting, the Council staff, with assistance from the district orientation and mobility specialists, teachers and counselors, will provide training to the hotel's key staff members on offering assistance, giving it when requested, and how to best provide that assistance.

On the issue of ADA compliance, the Council adopted a policy for responding to ADA violations. If a hotel is believed to be in violation of ADA, the Council will inform the hotel of the violations in writing and ask that they be corrected. If this is not done in a reasonable period of time, the Council will file a complaint with the Department of Justice.

RSB'S USE OF THE INTERNET

During the period of this report, there have been several developments regarding RSB's use of the Internet. Although RSB does not have Internet connectivity for all district offices yet, it is planned for the immediate future.

RSB's homepage on the Internet was created by DSS/DFS in April, 1997, with minimal information available. RSB and SRAC staff updated the home page through the summer, and the new home page is on the web at:

<<http://www.state.mo.us/dss/dfs/rehab/rehab.htm>>.

This web page was constructed to provide consumers with an overview of the agency's mission and brief descriptions of each of the available programs. From the common page, there are links to five different sub-pages: 1) Vocational Rehabilitation, 2) Independent Living, 3) Business Enterprise Program, 4) Employer Information and, 5) Prevention of Blindness. Each of these sub-pages contains material (both text and graphics) from the RSB brochures on the individual programs. They also contain RSB 1-800 number, an e-mail address for additional information, and the map and contact information that is currently on the back of all RSB brochures. There are links to other sites of interest to consumers, and more will be added as they become known.

RSB is also on the Web at the Rehabilitation Recruitment Center. The National Clearinghouse on Rehabilitation Training Materials, located at Oklahoma State University, has developed a Website devoted to recruitment for public rehabilitation agencies. This site is located at:

<http://www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/index_3.html>.

From a listing of all states on the site, selecting Missouri and RSB will provide information about RSB, along with job descriptions for counselor, rehabilitation teacher and O&M positions, which remain open constantly.

MINORITY OUTREACH

During the May, 1997 meeting, an ad-hoc committee was formed to advise the SRAC on matters pertaining to outreach to minorities. Some of the areas of concern include getting minorities to serve on the Council, as well as the accessibility of RSB services to minority communities throughout the state. Membership of the committee was not appointed prior to the end of this report period.

RSB created a minority outreach task force in July, 1997. This task force is charged with identifying ways to improve RSB's services to minority communities. Included are methods that enhance service delivery in the minority community, communicating the availability and nature of

RSB services to persons within the minority community, and finally, involvement of minorities and persons from traditionally underrepresented groups in the planning process at RSB. The chair of the SRAC Minority Outreach Committee will act as SRAC representative to the RSB task force.

NEW COUNCIL MEMBER ORIENTATION:

At the August, 1996 meeting, a proposal was presented by the SRAC staff to include new Council members in RSB new staff orientation sessions. Present Council members would also be welcome to participate in the orientation. Council members would also be invited to visit a district office and have the option of going out in the field with RSB staff. There was a consensus from the Council to include members of the Council in new staff orientation on a voluntary basis.

In October, 1996, RSB hosted a new staff orientation session in Jefferson City. In addition to new staff members from every entry-level job classification, two SRAC members attended the training. The members received approximately 16 hours of training on diseases/structure of the eye, the history and philosophy of rehabilitation, and the rehabilitation process as practiced by RSB. All programs administered by RSB were presented, including Older Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation, Business Enterprise Program and the Prevention of Blindness Program. Council members took their own role in explaining the Council and its purposes to the RSB staff in the training session.

All future new staff orientation sessions will be open to SRAC members, regardless of tenure.

SECTION IV. SUMMARY

The operation of the Missouri SRAC during the period of this report varied from that of previous years. Due to an improved understanding of the roles of the agency and the Council, improved structuring of the Council for the most effective use of time, and increasing awareness of the benefits of Council participation, the cooperative environment has resulted

in SRAC involvement in every aspect of RSB operations. All matters discussed in this report have been discussed with, briefed to, or developed from ideas that originated with the SRAC. This level of inclusion has allowed a great step forward in the ability of the SRAC to affect the rehabilitation process in Missouri. By providing the "consumer's touch" to all areas of RSB programs and policies, the SRAC makes a significant contribution to making rehabilitation more "user-friendly," consumer based and focused.

Whether providing formal input and recommendations to RSB, or advocating with education officials and legislators to illustrate the plight of children who are blind in Missouri, the SRAC has continued to take on issues that relate to services that will promote the personal and vocational success of blind Missourians. With a new slate of officers for FY 1998, the SRAC looks forward to assisting RSB in the challenge of maintaining the pace of success for consumers who are blind or visually impaired.

